Even if You Don't

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Even if You Don't

by All_InProcess

Summary

"It's yours," is what Johnny had said.

"I'm yours," is what Johnny really meant.

Notes

saw The Bikeriders tonight and i'm not okay.

See the end of the work for more notes

Johnny's first mistake was thinking that it would mean anything to him.

That was half the reason he fell for Benny in the first place. Before he even realized that he fell for him, he saw the way that Benny never seemed to bat an eye at anything and immediately Johnny knew that he wanted, needed, to keep him close by. Everything that they'd gone through, everything they'd done for the club, it never seemed to break the skin. Not Benny's. Other guys, yeah, but not Benny. Never Benny.

His real mistake was thinking that he would be the one thing that would get underneath Benny's skin. He wanted to. More than almost anything else he wanted to be the thing that put a crack in Benny's armor, the thing that protected him more than the denim and patch on his back. But he wasn't, even though he tried.

"It's yours," Johnny said, standing so close to Benny that Benny could feel his breath fanning across his skin. "Just…think about it."

Benny didn't look at him. Johnny's lips were practically brushing against the impossibly smooth skin of Benny's cheek and it was like he didn't even notice. Johnny felt like his breath was catching in the back of his throat and he didn't want to think that he was alone in that.

Maybe, he thought, his first mistake wasn't thinking that it would matter to Benny. Maybe his first mistake was saying something other than what he really meant. If Johnny had plucked up the courage to say what he was really feeling, maybe *then* it would've mattered to Benny. The truth, laid out bare and vulnerable the way it should've been, might have gotten Benny to at least meet his eyeline.

It shouldn't have been any harder to say, really. The truth in its totality was no longer of an explanation than the sliver of it that he'd offered to Benny in that moment. But he just couldn't do it. Johnny could take a lot of beatings and still come out on top, keep getting back up again. He could wipe out on his bike and not hesitate to throw his leg back over it again once he got it upright. He could take all of that and then some with almost no complaints. But he knew he couldn't take the toll of telling Benny everything and still having him walk away.

Kathy's words rattled relentless around his skull. It was easier to blame his hesitancy on her so that was exactly what he did. It was her, not his own cowardice, that made him flake in the moment when it mattered most. He held his tongue and watched Benny hobble away

on his crutch, not even sparing Johnny a backwards glance as he did. He wanted him, even if he couldn't have him.

Benny never brought it up again. Johnny had to fight the urge every day to ask him about it. If the two of them hadn't been men of such few words, he never would've been able to stop himself. He should've just been honest from the start. It'd make for one less weight on his shoulders. Late at night when he was laying in bed staring up at the ceiling, Johnny could swear that he felt the warmth radiating off Benny's cheek still lingering on his skin. They'd been so close.

It was the middle of the night when Johnny tried to tell him again. The two of them cloaked in darkness, just like last time. Only this time their privacy wasn't secured by an empty field, but by the close confines of Johnny's car. They were still so close, and Benny still wasn't looking at him.

"I can't run this on my own anymore," Johnny said. Not a lie but still not the full truth.

Benny wasn't looking at him. His eyes were locked on the windshield, or rather on the street in front of them. Johnny was no mind-reader but he was still willing to bet that Benny was probably thinking about how quickly and easily he could get out of the car and make his way back over to his bike. Johnny couldn't let him slip away without saying what he needed to. Not again.

"This club…it needs someone like you." He was kicking himself for each word as it came out but he didn't stop. "Not even someone *like you*," he said as he shook his head. "It needs *you*. You."

Benny raised his eyebrows slightly and Johnny thought that maybe they were getting somewhere. He was thinking that maybe Benny would turn and look at him and he'd see it all in Johnny's eyes so he wouldn't have to say it all out loud. Benny would just know what to do because Benny always knew what to do. Then Benny's gaze just dropped to his own hands instead.

Johnny rested his hand on the console between them. He drew in a deep breath as slowly and quietly as he could, not wanting to give himself away although he briefly considered the fact that it was already too late for that. His hand clenched into a fist, grip tighter than it'd ever been wrapped around a handlebar, blunt nails digging into the meat of his palm.

He was able to look at Benny all the way up until the moment he

started to speak again. Right as the first word started to tumble out, he stared at his clenched fist with more intensity than Benny was staring at his hands. If he looked at his hand, he wouldn't be able to see the reaction or lack thereof on Benny's face as he said, "*I* need you."

The pause was agonizing. Silence hadn't ever caused Johnny's ears to ring quite so loudly before. His hand started to tremble as it stayed clenched on the console. He didn't know what he was expecting. But he wanted it to be *something*. There wasn't even the click of the door handle to let him know that Benny was walking away all over again.

Johnny's voice had a bare hint of a tremor to it when he spoke up again, most of it disguised underneath the usual rasp. "I can't do this without you."

Benny shrugged, looking at Johnny's clenched fist. "You've been runnin' the club fine so far."

Despite the passive nature of Benny's words, they still breathed confidence into Johnny that had been slipping away in the silent moments before. He found it in himself to look at Benny even if he wasn't going to return the favor. "I don't mean the club. I can't…" he trailed off for a moment, forcing his hand to open, palm flattening against the console again. "Club's yours if you want it. I'm yours even if you don't."

That was what did it. Benny's eyes flicked up from the console. He kept his expression trained, neutral the way that it so often. But the unwavering eye contact that he was finally giving said more than a blush or a frown or a smile ever would have. Johnny felt the air get stuck in the back of his throat again, felt the flashback of warmth from Benny's skin despite the distance between them.

Slowly, almost methodically, Benny brought his hand up. He dragged the pads of his fingertips across his lips, like the action was coaching him into whatever his next move was going to be. Johnny couldn't take his eyes off of Benny's, but even so he was painstakingly aware of the fall of Benny's hand. It didn't land on top of Johnny's. He didn't get the reward of the warmth of Benny's palm coating the back of his hand the way he desperately yearned for. But Benny's hand did land in such a way that the tips of his fingers hooked against his. A ghost of a touch but somehow still more than Johnny felt like he'd ever gotten from him before.

It was always Johnny, really. Johnny's hand out in an offer of help from the ground after a fight. Johnny's arm tucked against Benny's back helping him limp away after wiping out of his bike. Johnny's hand firm against his chest pulling him back before Benny took things a few hits too far. It was always Johnny. Reaching. Starting. Hoping.

Now he could feel the pull of Benny's fingers against his own. Touch that he didn't initiate. Touch that Benny wasn't pulling away from but rather leaning into. Johnny didn't know when Benny's face got so close to his, the two of them drawing closer and closer like a pair of magnets. Always pulling despite it all. There was no barrier this time, no safety net of Johnny's lips beside Benny's cheek, breath against his jawline. He couldn't hide. Benny wasn't letting him.

"Think about it," Johnny said, repeating his words from before. He wondered if Benny would see it now, the way that it'd always been about this. Or maybe he always knew. Maybe he just wanted Johnny to say it so he knew he meant it.

Benny's lips brushed against his in a way that somehow managed to be soft but still knock the wind out of him in a way that a landed punch never had. Soft in a way that Johnny hadn't felt deserving of for longer than he could remember.

Then he was gone again. Hands in his lap, leaning back in the passenger seat like none of it had even happened. Eyes fixed forward once more while Johnny was still fighting the urge to lunge across the console to finish what they were finally starting.

Benny didn't care about anything until he did, and even then he didn't show it. Johnny reminded himself of that as he felt the chilly air winding its way between his fingers where Benny's had previously been. He fixed himself so that he was properly back in the driver's seat. There was a slight frown tugging at his lips as he tried to think about anything other than the rapid beat of his heart. Meanwhile Benny looked like he was thinking about his next cigarette.

Johnny's tongue darted out along his bottom lip, gathering up the last traces of Benny he'd have for now, or for good if the cards didn't fall just right. It wasn't until he saw Benny mirror the same action, the fleeting but pensive look on his face as he did so, that Johnny allowed himself to entertain the thought that maybe Benny wasn't as impenetrable as he'd originally thought. Benny who never batted an eye, Benny who acted first and thought about it later, Benny who didn't bother asking questions. Benny who never flinched when it

came to the club. That was the Benny that Johnny knew.

But now this wasn't about the club anymore. He watched Benny, for the first time in a long time, think before making his next move. Then Johnny watched Benny reach for the handle of the door and he just hoped that he wasn't making another mistake. The tightness in his chest was soothed only by the look Benny cast back over his shoulder at him as he walked to his bike. A ghost of a smirk on his face.

will be thinking about these two forever.

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